

TORONTO REGION COVID-19 HOSPITAL OPERATIONS

Learner Participation in Care of Person Under Investigation (PUI), Presumed COVID+ & COVID+ Patients in Hospital Based Placements

Version Date: March 3, 2021

The following revisions have been made to the version last circulated on September 11, 2020.

- Clarity of language on PUI, presumed COVID+, and confirmed COVID+
- Learner permissions related to care of recovering COVID-19+ patients

PURPOSE

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide recommendations and add clarity to inform decision-making related to managing learner participation in caring for persons under investigation (PUI), presumed COVID+, and confirmed COVID+ patients.

BACKGROUND

As learners are reintegrated into hospital-based placements, competency level, learning objectives of the professional program, and risk tolerance of Educational Institutions and Hospitals are being considered as it relates to learner involvement in caring for PUI, presumed COVID+ and COVID+ patients. As COVID-19 evolves into a regular component of clinical practices, the new realities of the required competencies of health care providers are also under review.

At the onset of phase 1 of learner reintegration, restrictions related to suspected, PUI and COVID+ patients were applied to learner practices, each restriction differing by Educational Institution, as well as programs within the same Educational Institution. Hospitals are being asked to manage the restrictions for each learner. The variability in restrictions may cause confusion for learners, Hospital staff and program staff in Educational Institutions. To avoid confusion, some hospitals have taken a cautious approach and advised that learners not care for these patients, even if permitted to by the Educational program.

With large numbers of learners returning to in-person placements, children returning to school, and continued large numbers of COVID patient volumes, there is a need to revisit restrictions, establish harmonization, and ensure clarity and equity of appropriate learning opportunities across the region.

CLARITY OF LANGUAGE

As our understanding of COVID-19 transmission, assessment and treatment continues to grow, we have established greater clarity related to COVID-19-associated clinical assessments and resulting patient care pathways. Due to the broad interpretation of PUI and the associated vagueness of COVID-19 symptoms/transmission, the term "Person under Investigation or PUI" is undesirable for clinical use. It had been used in the public health sphere to broadly identify individuals who may be at risk for COVID-19. With the prevalence of community spread of COVID-19 and dependent on the interpretation of the term, many individuals may be considered a PUI, including those awaiting lab results.

In practice, patients are clinically assessed for COVID-19; those with high-risk clinical and epidemiological factors, with or without a positive test, are categorized as *presumed COVID+*. These patients are cared for similarly to those who are lab-confirmed COVID+, including precautions such as droplet/contact isolation (airborne, droplet and contact precautions for Aerosol Generating Medical Procedures), essential providers, among others.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** It is assumed that all learners will be provided with and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for their placement activities per legislation, provincial directives and hospital policies.
2. **Skills & Competencies:** As with all clinical and professional activities during placements, learner competencies will be considered to determine appropriateness of tasks and will be under supervision.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

The following approach is recommended to ensure alignment and clarity related to learner permissions for caring for COVID+ patients. Hospitals and Academic Institutions are committed to working together to ensure learners are understand of their scope of practice, including any restrictions related to caring for presumed/COVID+ patients.

1. Learners may participate in the care of patients awaiting COVID-19 test results and/or PUIs

As hospitals continue to shift away from the use of the term PUI to more applicable and descriptive clinical language, as approved on September 11, 2020 by the Toronto COVID-19 Hospital Education Table, *it should be assumed that a learner participating in a hospital-based placement may participate in the care of patients awaiting COVID-19 test results and/or PUI as part of their placement, as appropriate for their skills and competencies.*

2. Learners may participate in the care of recovered COVID-19+ patients

Patients who are recovered from COVID-19 are defined as no longer being infectious since precautions have been discontinued by Infection Prevention and Control. *It is recommended that it be assumed that learners may participate in the care of recovered COVID-19 patients as part of their placement, as appropriate for their skills and competencies.*

3. Where appropriate, learners should be enabled to participate in the care of presumed COVID+ and COVID+ patients

As the pandemic evolves and our knowledge about COVID-19 transmission, assessment and treatment grows, *academic partners are encouraged to enable learners to participate in the care of presumed COVID+ and lab-confirmed COVID+ patients, where appropriate.* In alignment with all clinical and professional activities during placements, learner competencies will be considered to determine appropriateness of tasks, and the quality and educational value of the experience. This would only be done under supervision and with the provision of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for the learner.

4. Creation of central repository for learners permitted to work with COVID+ patients

To create clarity on learners who are permitted to care for COVID+ patients or patients presumed to be COVID+, a central repository of member-based permissions will be developed. This would be informed and validated by the Toronto COVID-19 Hospital Education Table, maintained through TAHSN, and housed on the Toronto COVID-19 Hospital Education Table shared drive.

Exceptions may occur should regulatory bodies, professional colleges and insurance providers release requirements and restrictions related to learner interactions with COVID-19.

Prepared and Approved By:
TAHSN Education Table

N.B. Please note that this document is only providing guidance and/or recommendations to support individual planning for hospitals within the Toronto Region of Ontario Health. This document does not constitute provincial decisions, directions or guidance.